Effective Grading

A Tool for Learning and Assessment

Barbara E. Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson

Foreword by Thomas A. Angelo
Making Grading More Time-Efficient

One of the basic principles explained in Chapter Two was to reconsider your use of time. Throughout the book, we have been presenting suggestions for how to use in-class time and out-of-class time and how to distribute your time among giving, guiding, and grading assignments. This chapter forms part of that larger picture. In it, we discuss how you can do a good job of grading while also keeping your grading time to a minimum and making sure that every minute you spend grading pays off handsomely in terms of student learning and useful assessment.

Strategies for Time-Effective Grading

To achieve these goals, we suggest you consider these strategies, around which our chapter is organized:

1. Separate commenting from grading, and use them singly or in combination according to your purpose.
2. Do not give to all students what only some need.
3. Use only as many grade levels as you need.
4. Frame comments to your students’ use.
5. Do not waste time on careless student work.
6. Use what the student knows.
7. Ask students to organize their work for your efficiency.
8. Delegate the work.
9. Use technology to save time and enhance results.
We describe each of these briefly and then offer some examples of teachers who use various combinations of the principles to keep their grading time to a minimum and make every minute count.

**Strategy 1: Separate Commenting from Grading**

One action that will enormously affect your grading time is to think very carefully about which combination of comments and grades will be most time-saving and effective for learning. Grades need not be given to every piece of student work—only if you or your students need that type of assessment. Comments need not necessarily accompany grades—only if learning results.

With each piece of student work, ask yourself the following questions:

- Why am I assigning a grade to this?
- Will the benefits be worth my time?
- Could I do something else instead?
- Merely offer credit for having done the work?
- Offer comments but no grade?
- Fold this work into a larger work?
- Include this work in a portfolio?
- Do all my students need a grade?

Here are some examples. If you ask students to submit a prospectus, thesis sentence, sketch, graphs, data, outline, proposal, draft, or other work that is preliminary to a larger work, the preliminary material may not need to be separately graded because it later becomes part of the grade of the larger or more polished piece. For example, as students prepare essays, an English teacher asks them to bring tentative thesis sentences to class on transparencies. They write their names on the very bottom of the transparencies so the teacher can display the transparencies on the screen without showing the name but can later give credit to the student for having done the assignment. In class, she pulls transparencies at random from the pile and reviews as many of them as she can right there in the class, displaying them anonymously on the screen, discussing them and making suggestions for improvement. Five minutes before the end of the class, she sits down at her desk in the front of the room, takes out her gradebook, and makes a check next to the name of each student who has handed in a transparency. Then she hands all transparencies back to the students so they can take them home and use them as they further develop their essays. She tells her students, "If I did not get to your transparencies in the class discussion, and you still need response, see me after class." A few students do so, and she either responds on the spot or makes an appointment. But most students, even those whose theses were not discussed in the class, have the feedback they need. They typically respond with comments such as, "Oh, yeah, mine was like that second one you showed. Too broad. I know what to do." The teacher does not need to grade these theses. Notice that she does not even take them home. Yet she has been able to give very helpful feedback to her students, and on end-of-semester evaluations, they frequently mention its value.

Here's another example: portfolios are frequent in fields such as art, architecture, and design, but other faculty can use them also. For example, one chemistry faculty member who teaches a large lecture class asks students to write frequent short assignments but does not grade each one. Instead, he responds to them in two ways: (1) he uses them as the basis for class discussion, asking students to read them with a neighbor or to bring them on transparencies to discuss with the class as a whole; (2) he then has students keep the assignments in a folder. At midterm and at the end of the semester, he has students hand in all their short assignments in a portfolio. The student makes a table of contents so the teacher can see that all assignments are present. The student also chooses two assignments, revises and types them, and includes them as the first two items in the portfolio. The teacher bases the portfolio grade on two factors: the percentage of total assignments present in the portfolio and the quality of the two revised and typed assignments.

In the examples we have given, students have not complained about not receiving grades for the informal writing. However, if yours do, you need to rethink what you are doing. We do not advocate doing anything that makes students feel their teacher has not paid appropriate attention to their work. One important action on your part is to explain fully and often why you are handling student work in the way you are, what you think grades are for, and why you are or are not giving grades or comments on a particular assignment. Relate ungraded work clearly to work that will be graded. Help students see how the ungraded work will be useful to them.

**Strategy 2: Do Not Give to All Students What Only Some Need**

We advise asking yourself, Do all my students need grades? Perhaps most of your students do not need a grade on a particular assignment, but a few students feel very anxious if they get any
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We advise asking yourself, Do all my students need grades? Perhaps most of your students do not need a grade on a particular assignment, but a few students feel very anxious if they get any
paper back without a grade. But must you grade every paper to meet the needs of a few? That issue bothered Walvoord greatly until she hit upon a solution. In class, she said with a grin, “Hey, I’m a teacher, I’m paid to grade student work, I’ve given thousands of grades in my career, and I can grade anything! If you want an unofficial grade on any piece of informal writing, or on a draft, just write ‘please grade’ at the top, or come and ask me, and I’ll tell you unofficially what the grade would be.” That solution worked. Students who needed to know a grade got their needs met. The grades were unofficial, so Walvoord did not have to figure out how to determine final course grades for students who got more grades than others. She did keep a record of unofficial grades she had given to her students and checked to be sure they were consistent with grades or comments she later made on their work.

You can also shape comments to student needs. If you think that, because of class discussion or some other reason, some of your students may not need as full a comment from you as other students do, ask them to write at the top of their papers, as they submit them, whether they need further comment.

**STRATEGY 3**

**Use Only As Many Grade Levels As You Need**

The traditional grading system, with pluses and minuses, is a thirteen-level system. If you decide you should grade a particular assignment, ask yourself, Do I need a thirteen-level system, or would fewer levels accomplish the purpose? The fewer the levels, the faster you can grade.

What can you use instead of a thirteen-level system?

- Use a six-level system (A through F) without pluses and minuses
- Use a two-level system (pass-fail or credit-no credit)

The basic rule is to use the lowest number of grading levels consonant with your purpose and with student learning. It is easy to assume that, because at the end of the course you must assign grades in a thirteen-level system, every grade along the way must be calibrated on the same system.

Two systems that release you from having to grade everything on a thirteen-point scale are the accumulated points system and the defintional system we explained in Chapter Six.

The next sections contain suggestions for offering comments.

**STRATEGY 4**

**Frame Comments to Your Students’ Use**

The basic principle of commenting is that your comments are part of a communication between you and your student, and the comment only succeeds if it produces the desired learning on the student’s part. Research suggests that your comments will be understood within the context of the individual classroom, your ongoing conversation with the students during the semester, and students’ preconceptions about the roles of comments. Particularly, students are likely to fix upon a goal of doing what the teacher wants, when you might rather have them strive to develop independent judgment (Ferris, 1995; Sperling and Freedman, 1987; Yagelski, 1995). Your goal, then, is to ensure accurate and effective communication with students while using your time to the best advantage.

The first question to ask yourself is, Have I chosen a teachable moment to make this comment? Especially, you will want to question the usefulness of making extensive comments on students’ finished, graded work when no further revision is possible. A true anecdote illustrates. Walvoord recently overheard two students: one said to her friend, “What did you get on the paper?” The friend replied, “Eh, I only got a B. I was really disappointed.” She was probably a good student who had expected a good grade. She went on to say, “He wrote all over the paper! He wrote a book! I didn’t even read it.” Imagine the faculty member, sitting there on a Sunday afternoon when he could have been out walking in the woods, earnestly writing comments all over the paper, trying to explain in great detail why this student got a B, perhaps knowing she’d be disappointed—and what happens? She doesn’t even read his comments.

We think one moral of this story is this: only put your time into comments that reach students in a teachable moment. Don’t throw away your work on an unteachable moment. When that student saw the B it was psychologically all over for her. There was nothing more she could do. The professor had to take enough time to grade the paper fairly; his mistake was to think that he also had to write all over it. Often, a teachable moment is when there is still something the student can do to improve the grade on a live assignment. Comments on drafts or on works in progress are likely to be more worthwhile than extensive comments on final work. The exception might be when subsequent work will be sufficiently similar that the students believe they can readily use in the next
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assignment whatever you say on this one. But don’t overestimate their ability to see the carryover. Some semester, ask them what use they made of your comments. We suggest that you ask for your own classes, What are the teachable moments? Try to gather real information about how your students use your comments. Commenting is so time-consuming, it is worthwhile to examine it carefully, making sure that every moment is paying off.

In addition to knowing when to make comments, it’s helpful to know what kinds of comments, and how extensive, are useful. Do not automatically assume you must comment on everything you can think of, offering both marginal and end comments. Nancy Sommers (1982), interviewing students after they had received back their papers with teacher comments, found that a number of things might go wrong when the teacher combines local-level suggestions about grammar and punctuation with more global suggestions about content and organization. First, the student might be misled by a large number of grammar and punctuation comments into spending disproportionate energy on those aspects and ignoring the larger issues of content and structure. Also, extensive local-level comments may encourage students in the view that it is the teacher’s job to mark everything that is wrong, and their job to change what the teacher wants changed. The work is no longer theirs but the teacher’s. Extensive comments may encourage a revision process by which a student merely goes through the paper line by line fixing whatever the teacher has marked without internalizing the principles that could guide revision in the student’s future work. Finally, when revising the work their teacher has extensively marked, students may be reluctant to make any changes in unmarked text, thereby circumventing the growth and discovery that might otherwise take place in the student’s thinking (see Walvoord and Breihan, 1991). So the time you spend marking local problems in the margins of the student’s paper may backfire.

If the student’s paper is flawed in its conception, evidence, structure, or line of reasoning, it may be best to say only that. Concentrate the learner’s attention on the crucial thing that must be addressed first. You may warn about lower-level problems to be addressed later, but you need not mark each one. For example, unfocused drafts often need take only a little of your time. You might only need to say, “I can’t discern this paper’s main point. Try writing in a single sentence, ‘What I really want to say is . . .’ then plan the paper to support that main point. If you need help, I’d be happy to discuss it with you.”

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When commenting on global issues, you will want to use marginal comments or specific examples to illustrate what you mean. For example, “Your thesis is clear, but support for your claims is thin. I have marked a few examples in the margins. Your support is strongest in the third paragraph on page 3; my marginal comments try to show you why that paragraph is strong.”

This brings up a related, potentially time-saving question: do you need to comment on everything or only on some aspects of the assignment? If the assignment serves a limited purpose, then perhaps you need comment only on that issue. When your tennis teacher wants to spend a lesson on your backhand stroke, she may comment only on that, leaving your wretched serve or your erratic net play for a later lesson. In a geography class of two hundred students, a professor gives students raw data on a chart and asks them to draw conclusions from it. In grading and responding to that assignment, he concerns himself only with the quality of their inferences from the data, and his comments address only that issue.

If you limit the concerns you will address for a particular assignment, you need to tell students that clearly and early on the assignment sheet.

So far, we have assumed that your comments will be written (or sent by e-mail). It may seem anomalous in a chapter on saving time to suggest that you shift from written comments to verbal, face-to-face comments. However, as we explained in Chapter Seven, face-to-face comments may accomplish more effective communication in the same amount of time it would take to write comments on the paper. But the secret is to restrict your comments to the aspects that are appropriate to the writer at that point in the process.

Breihan, the historian, provides an example of thoughtful deliberation about which kinds of grades and comments to give at which points for which purposes. We’ve seen how he uses class time to give response to informal writings that then get only a credit-no credit mark or a certain number of points, with few if any written comments. But now let’s look at how Breihan handles grading and commenting on the formal, graded argumentative essays. First, his comments are most thorough on drafts. He requires all students to hand in drafts of their first essay of the semester, he responds, and then students revise. That’s heavily time-consuming, and he can’t afford to do it for the second and third essays. On the second, he makes revision voluntary, so fewer students choose it, and on the third, it’s the final exam, so they write it in class. But Breihan uses draft response for the first essay, when students have the most to gain by a learning experience. How can he afford the time to do this? He uses time previously spent writing all over the finished essays. He spends more time on draft response than on response to the final paper because drafts
Exhibit 8.1. Breihan’s Responses to History Students’ Essays.

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Obviously, Breihan invested a lot of work on the drafts and offered a very thorough response. That’s because it was a teachable moment; students revised the drafts for their final grades. But at the point of the final grade, Breihan spent only enough time to ensure that the grade was fair. He typically would scribble a sentence or two on the paper, such as, “Much better on evidence.” He made another check on the checklist to represent the new status of the paper. He wrote a grade at the top of the paper. Period. Students who wanted more explanation were warmly welcomed to see him, and a few did. In this way, Breihan said, “I got myself out of the business of justifying the grade and into the business of coaching the student’s progress.”

Breihan’s method changes the traditional distribution of teacher time for grading and guiding students’ work. In the old method, the teacher gave the assignment and answered questions about it but otherwise spent very little time guiding the process, and then spent most of his or her time writing comments all over the final version, describing the faults of the product—it’s poorly organized, unfocused, too general, lacks support, and so on. Such comments often do not help students know where their processes went wrong for that paper, much less what they can do to make the next one more successful. Breihan’s method places emphasis on teaching and guiding during the process. The final grading then takes less time. Figure 8.1 is a diagram of time distribution of teacher time for giving an assignment, guiding the process, and grading it.

One special question to consider is the extent to which you want to comment on small, recurring details in student work. In written work, this means grammar, punctuation, and spelling; in other media, it may mean technical aspects, arithmetic, and the like. When problems in these areas are numerous, it is tempting to mark each one—for example, to circle all the grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. In special situations, and in language classes, you may want to do that. But for the faculty member in geology or philosophy or business, marking all the grammar and punctuation is probably a waste of time.

Consider a few different scenarios. One is that you have required well-edited work, and the student knows the rules but simply has not carefully proofread or checked her work. One thing you want to teach is proofreading skills. Another thing you want to teach is the importance of spending time on checking the details of one’s work. If you mark all the errors, you are teaching neither of these things. You are doing half the work for the student. It is better to say, “There are many spelling and grammar errors in this paper. Please find and fix them. I have marked a sample paragraph. If you need help, call the writing center at extension 3983.”

A second scenario is that you have required well-edited work, and the student’s errors are due to lack of knowledge about the rules. Now you need to determine whether you can teach the rules in the available time. Some rules can be taught quickly and cleanly in a marginal comment. (“Periods and commas almost always belong inside the quotation marks.”) But most rules of grammar and punctuation run deep into the roots of the language, and it takes special expertise to teach them. For the sociology teacher to scribble fragment and run-on at various points on the paper probably will not greatly help an eighteen-year-old or a fifty-eight-year-old student who has not already learned the rules about written English sentence construction. That student, whether speaking English as a native or a second language, needs a series of sessions at the writing center or a self-guiding book or computer program that will take him or her systematically through the complex
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A second scenario is that you have required well-edited work, and the student's errors are due to lack of knowledge about the rules. Now you need to determine whether you can teach the rules in an available time. Some rules can be taught quickly and cleanly in a marginal comment. ("Periods and commas almost always belong inside the quotation marks.") But most rules of grammar and punctuation run deep into the roots of the language, and it takes special expertise to teach them. For the sociology teacher to scribble fragment and run-on at various points on the paper probably will not greatly help an eighteen-year-old or a fifty-eight-year-old student who has not already learned the rules about written English sentence construction. That student, whether speaking English as a native or a second language, needs a series of sessions at the writing center or a self-guiding book or computer program that will take him or her systematically through the complex
grammatical issues involved. Perhaps your best comment is to recommend that course of action.

A third scenario is that you did not or need not require well-edited work. Here are three kinds of work on which you may not want yourself or your student to spend much time worrying about grammar, punctuation, and spelling: (1) informal exercises such as Brehm uses daily in his classroom (Exhibit 4.3); (2) in-class work where students are in haste and have no dictionaries or time to proofread; (3) drafts of work that will eventually be polished.

A faculty member in architecture applies a similar philosophy to students’ graphic work. He urges his students, in early stages of a project, to just get ideas down without worrying about details or technique.

Some disciplines, such as languages and athletics, routinely create times and places where students are urged to build fluency and confidence, to speak or run or play fluidly even though they will make errors. In these cases the teacher or coach does not pick at the errors but urges learners to just play or just talk. In your classroom, ask whether it might be appropriate to create such occasions to build fluency and confidence.

**STRATEGY 5**

**Do Not Waste Time on Careless Student Work**

This suggestion is not contrary to the one preceding. This one concerns the time you spend responding to work where you have asked for care, on any dimension, and have instead received careless work. Can you figure out how to get that work off your desk quickly? Or not to let the work get on your desk in the first place? And to teach the student what she or he needs to learn?

One literature faculty member, for example, asked students to complete a checklist and attach it to the top of their papers. On it, the student had to check off a number of items:

- I read the short story at least twice.
- I revised this paper at least once.
- I spent at least five hours on this paper.
- I started work on this paper at least three days ago.
- I have tried hard to do my best work on this paper.
- I proofread the paper at least twice for grammar and punctuation.
- I asked at least one other person to proofread the paper.
- I ran the paper through a spelling check.

“If you can’t check off on these items,” the teacher said, “I don’t even want to see your paper.” Of course, students might check the items without actually doing them, but at least the checklist taught students something about their teacher’s expectations, and she believed that it enhanced the quality of the work she got and saved her from having to spend time on hasty or superficial work.

**STRATEGY 6**

**Use What the Student Knows**

Faculty members could often save time if they tapped what students know about their own work. Why spend time writing comments about a paper’s focus when the student, if asked, would respond, “Oh, I knew that paper wasn’t well focused”? How can you tap this information? Some teachers we know ask students to preface work they hand in with a half-page evaluation of the work. The student need not say what grade she thinks the work should get but tells what she thinks is its strongest and weakest points and what advice she would give herself for further improvement. Often the teacher only needs to write, “I agree.” For oral or performance situations, you might take a few moments for the student to “debrief”—to tell you or the class what she or he thought about the presentation (“I thought I might have picked up the pace a little bit—was it too slow?”) Then the class and teacher responses can build on those perceptions.

**STRATEGY 7**

**Ask Students to Organize Their Work for Your Efficiency**

Ask yourself, Where do I waste time in the physical or logistical aspects of grading? Can you instruct students to organize their work for your efficiency? For example, do you hunt through students’ papers to see whether all the parts are present? If so, how about requiring a table of contents? Do you have to search for pages caught under someone else’s paper clip? Ban paper clips.

If you use a checklist such as the one just shown you can add other efficiency items to it:

- This paper is stapled, not paper clipped
- On top of the paper, I have included an evaluation of my work.

Take a hint from your gas and electric company. They know that human beings cannot always think of all the little details. On the back flap of the envelope, they give the bill payer a checklist: “Did you write your account number on the check? Did you sign the
grammatical issues involved. Perhaps your best comment is to recommend that course of action.

A third scenario is that you did not or need not require well-edited work. Here are three kinds of work on which you may not want yourself or your student to spend much time worrying about grammar, punctuation, and spelling: (1) informal exercises such as Breihan uses daily in his classroom (Exhibit 4.3); (2) in-class work where students are in haste and have no dictionaries or time to proofread; (3) drafts of work that will eventually be polished.

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check?” Podunk Gas and Electric has figured out how to prod the human mind, with its shortcomings, into actions that will save time for the company. You can do the same.

**STRATEGY 8**

**Delegate the Work**

Ask yourself, Am I doing things in the grading process that other people could do? We suggested earlier that checklists can be given to students to help them organize their work for your efficiency and can thus help you avoid wasting time on careless work. But checklists can be much more broadly based than the ones we have shown so far, and they can help you delegate much of the work—in this case, to students themselves. Exhibit 8.2 shows several checklists.

Any of the self-checklists could also become a peer checklist so that students could check each other’s work. Exhibit 8.3 is a peer checklist that anthropologist Mark Curchak of Beaver College employed to guide students in responding to one another’s papers. Notice that Curchak’s checklist is a reading guide for student peers. It leads them through the steps of a careful and helpful reading. Without this sort of guidance, students may focus too early on low-level problems such as comma errors, or they may miss some aspects their teacher knows are important, or they may believe they have to give a grade or a judgment on the paper. The checklist guides them toward descriptive suggestions rather than outright judgments, which students find hard to express to their peers. The checklist also guides students in a sequence of questions; it is a guide to the reading-and-responding process. Armed with such a rubric, students should be able to give good help to one another.

When you arrange for student peer response, it is important to consider what kind of response you want to elicit and at what point you want it to be given. A psychologist who was using peer response had organized the process so that students gave each other responses on the basic elements of their psychology papers, then they revised their papers based on those comments, then they received their teachers’ comments and revised again before the final grade. However, what happened in a number of cases is that student peers did not critique the papers deeply enough, they often did not catch the most fundamental problems of conceptualization, organization, and evidence. And students did not take seriously their peers’ comments on these issues. So the first round of revisions, based on peer responses, tended to be too superficial. In the next round, when the teacher saw the papers, she made those fundamental criticisms and suggestions. By then, however, students had already invested a great deal of time in the papers, had

revised them once, and were disinclined to make the fundamental changes their teacher suggested. The psychologist came to see that she might better have reversed the order of response, doing it herself on the first round, to get at the most fundamental conceptual problems, and letting peers respond to the smaller-scale problems that were likely to turn up in the further revisions. She also saw ways to improve the checklist she gave students as a guide for their responses.

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**Exhibit 8.2. Checklists for Assignments from Three Disciplines.**

**Example 1**: Simple checklist for a chemistry assignment in which students are instructed to describe how they would prepare certain compounds. Students check each item before submitting the paper.

Emily Yakali, Chemistry, Raymond Walters College, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio

- Identification of the type of compound the product is
- Identification of the C-to-C bond to form to get the product
- Identification of the oxygen compound to be used
- [other items covering each aspect that must be present]

**Example 2**: Checklist for a "nursing process" form students complete, based on their clinical work for a course in "Family Adaptation." Students check each item before submitting the form.

Patricia Schlacht, Nursing, Raymond Walters College, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio

- Assessment is complete
- Nursing diagnosis uses program-approved format
- Nursing diagnosis is supported by assessment data
- [other items]

**Example 3**: Checklist for draft and final revision of an essay in a literature class. Students check each item before submitting the draft or final version.

Barbara Walvoord

**Draft**

- I have read the novel at least twice.
- The essay presents my own position and does not merely summarize others.
- My position is thoughtful; it challenges the reader; it goes beyond the obvious or the trite.
- [other items]

**Final**
check?” Podunk Gas and Electric has figured out how to prod the human mind, with its shortcomings, into actions that will save time for the company. You can do the same.

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- nursing diagnosis is supported by assessment data

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_barbara valvoord_

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Draft</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_____</td>
<td>I have read the novel at least twice.</td>
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</table>

[other items]
Exhibit 8.3. Curchak’s Peer Checklist for First Draft of Term Papers in Sociology.

Author of draft ____________________ Name of reviewer ____________________

Directions: By answering the following questions thoughtfully and clearly, be as helpful as possible to the author of this draft. Use complete sentences and specific examples to ensure clarity in your advice. You will be evaluated on the thoughtfulness and helpfulness of your responses.

1. Overall situation: How near to completion is this draft? What steps should the author take to complete this term paper? Be both specific and helpful in listing the three most important steps below:
   A. 
   B. 
   C. 

2. Organization: Is this draft organized in a standard pattern: an introductory section; the body of the paper, presenting the information in a reasonable sequence; and a summary and analysis of the situation? If there is an alternative organization, say what it is and whether it is effective.
   A. Does the introduction explain the topic and why it is important? Briefly state why you think it is important.
   B. After reading the paper, say whether you think the introduction introduces what you’ve read. Does it? How?

3. Introductory section: The first few paragraphs should prepare the reader (another student in the course) for the research that has been done on the topic.
   A. Does the introduction explain the topic and why it is important? Briefly state why you think it is important.
   B. After reading the paper, say whether you think the introduction introduces what you’ve read. Does it? How?

4. Body of the paper: The major portion of the paper should present the collected information in an orderly and clear fashion.
   A. In the space below, outline in some detail the major points established in the body of the paper and the evidence used to support the points.
   B. Is the style of the writing appropriate to the intended audience, you and the others in the class?
   C. Compared with that of the textbook, is the style more or less formal? How?
   D. Has the author thoroughly paraphrased the information from the references so that the writing style is consistent? Remember that inadequate paraphrasing is a common student problem and may even approach plagiarism.
   E. Has the writer organized the information in the most effective way?
      1. If not, suggest improvements.
      2. How would you characterize the organization? Is it a list of equal points, an arrangement of topics and subtopics, a chronological sequence, an argument with two or more opposing viewpoints, or what?
   F. How has the writer handled citations?
      1. Are they in an acceptable style, used consistently?

5. Conclusions: A conclusion can take several forms: a restatement of the overall argument of the paper, a summary of the key points, a combination of several points to make a final point, an analysis of the data, and so on.
   A. What form has the writer used to conclude the paper?
   B. Does the conclusion seem to be supported by the evidence? How or how not?

6. Features of the writing:
   A. Are there any problems in the grammar, spelling, punctuation, paragraph structure, sentence structure, transition? Which one(s) in particular? Do these problems interfere with the meaning the writer is trying to express?
   B. Has the writer acknowledged the help of others?

7. General evaluation: In the space remaining, give your general impression of the paper. Did you like it and why? What did you learn from it? What else do you wish you had learned from it? Give any other ideas that you think might help.


How can you use an assistant other than peers? We described how to use TA graders in Chapter Five. In addition to using the suggestions in that chapter, see whether you can get unpaid “assistants” whom your students locate and “hire” for you. We know a teacher who requires that all students find an “editor” somewhere in the outside world among their friends, children, parents, or spouses. The “editor” reads the paper and makes suggestions before the student hands it in. Students then write an acknowledgment page, just as their teacher does when publishing a book or article. The student might say, “I am indebted to my discussion group, John Anderson, Rafael Ruiz, Lawanda Washington, and Dawn O’Shaughnessy, for helping me work out the ideas for this paper, and to my friend Sandy Eckerd for proofreading it.” You may have to give students an example or two of the language of an acknowledgment.
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6. Features of the writing:
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STRATEGY 9
Use Technology to Save Time and Enhance Results

Here are a few ideas about using technology to make your grading and commenting time more efficient:

- Instead of writing on the student's paper, write the comments on your computer. When you find yourself writing the same thing over and over, create a boilerplate passage you can insert into your comments.
- Give students a handout, or make available to them on computer, your advice on various common problems—for example, your standard advice on a common math error. Then you can give students the handout or the computer file name for students to read your explanation.
- Use a spreadsheet for grading. Can your institution provide you with a class list you can download onto your own computer without rekeying all the student names?
- Record your comments into an audiotape. Students can hand you a blank tape when they submit their work. Record your comments on their tapes and hand back the tape with each person's work. The student can then listen to your comments. You can say more in five minutes than you can write.
- Use e-mail or bulletin boards to help your students respond to each other’s work.
- If possible, make yourself thoroughly accessible by e-mail, voice mail, and telephone, so students can quickly get answers to their questions as they work on their assignments. Answering a question as it comes up may save you later having to write a long explanation on the finished work.

ACTIVITY

1. Review this chapter and list suggestions you think you could use.
2. Work out the details of one of your ideas.
3. Discuss your ideas with peers and with students and revise as needed.
4. Keep a record for a week or two, or for a semester if you can, of how you spend your grading time. How could you reduce the time without significantly reducing the quality of your grading and teaching?

CHAPTER 9
Using the Grading Process to Improve Teaching

If you have been using the interactive teaching and assessment recommendations we offer in this book, and if you have produced a PTA scale and used it to score students' work, you will have a great deal of information about your students' strengths and weaknesses and about their learning processes. You can use that information to improve your teaching.

The strategies we recommend in this chapter are based on the grading process, because the book is about grading. But ungraded student work is also highly useful for assessing student learning and improving classroom practice. Angelo and Cross's 1993 book Classroom Assessment Techniques can guide you in using strategies such as the "one-minute paper" to assess student work that is not necessarily graded but is used to inform your teaching.

Improving Teaching: Two Case Studies

In this chapter we present two examples of teachers who used information stemming from the grading process to analyze students' learning and to improve their teaching. The first example is Anderson's biology class, for which you saw the assignment sheet in Exhibit 3.5 and the PTA scale in Exhibit 5.3. Here we'll talk about how Anderson used the PTA scale to improve her students' titles and their use of the scientific format (see also Anderson and Walvoord, 1991).

The students' product-comparison titles that appear in Chapter Five were written by students before Anderson constructed her